***Things that Can’t Be Discussed When Sober #11***

Nayoon Ahn

한 이 년 전부터 우리 동네는 재개발 지역이 됐다.

텅 비어있는 집들과 서서히 부숴지는 거리 그리고 빠르게 생기는 아파트

그것과 함께

어릴 때의 추억이 사라진다

다 부숴지고 모든 게 다 똑같이 생긴 아파트, 획일적인 교육, 평범한 길에서 벗어나면 부모조차

싫어하는 사회…

나는 어떻게 이 사회 속에서 이 길을 택하게 됐는지 아직 모르겠다. 단지 내 머릿속의 남들과

다르게 살고 싶다는 작은 생각 하나가 많은 걸 바꿔놓은 것 같다 *(translation at end)*

– 김홍열, 2.2.11

I don’t know where I was when the fight started. All I know is I was walking across the parking lot to the apartment entrance and there they were shouting to high heaven. The first thing I thought was that it was bad they were right next to the doors, they’d see me if I tried to go in. It wasn’t so much that I was worried they’d say what they usually said when I came home during the middle of the day when everyone else was at work but that I was worried they’d just ignore me like I didn’t exist. Then I was worried that the neighbors might hear and what would they think, but that was pretty stupid I admit because the neighbors’d heard all this already. I swear I didn’t even know what they were fighting about until I’d been rooted there to the sidewalk for the tenish seconds it took for me to think all this. In the end I just turned and started walking away even though I’d been out the whole day and I desperately needed a bathroom to go pee.

When the body hit the concrete it made the most sickening sound I’d ever heard in my entire life. It was a lumpy dull thud that instantly silenced everything within a hundred meter radius including my parents. I’d swiveled back as soon as I heard it and the only thing I could see was that it was a mishmash of blood and pink material splashed out on the ground. The only thing that really registered for me was that it was wearing a school uniform that I’d seen a lot before, but that wasn’t really surprising since our neighborhood has lots of schools nearby and once you see one uniform you’ve seen them all. It’d narrowly missed a black Sonata by half an arm’s length or so. I say *it* because at the time that was all it was to me.

There were people running from other apartment entrances across the lines of parked cars to the body. Of the seven or so people in the parking lot in the ten minutes after it happened only me and my parents were standing stock still. They commented on this afterwards. The police, I mean. They said it was suspicious the way we did nothing when everyone else was doing something. They asked if we knew if there’d been something going on. My dad and my mom and me were riding in a taxi behind the ambulance afterwards and all of us knew it but nobody was going to say it. We knew it was her the moment her head hit the pavement. We just did. We knew it was her the same way we remembered how she’d come home past twelve every night for two weeks straight even on the days she didn’t go to math tutoring. It’s not like you don’t realize these things before they happen. But it’s not like you can really do anything about them either. I couldn’t say that to the police officer. All I know is when we were riding home from the hospital my mom was trying to pick a fight and my dad was staring out of the window even though there was nothing to see and when my dad wouldn’t say anything my mom snapped to me what did you say to the police officer. What did he ask, she spat. He asked the same useless questions, didn’t he. All the police officers ask the same useless questions. I said he asked did you know anything. What did you say? said my mom. You knew better than to say – it’s ok. I cut her off. I didn’t say anything, I said. I’m not stupid, said my mom. You must’ve said something. I said I really didn’t say anything. I didn’t want to either. When the police officer asked me the same thing the third time I knew all he wanted was a line to go in his report, so I gave one to him. I wanted to say something that would shut up the *clack clack clack* of his typing that went droning on no matter what I said like it all didn’t matter anything to anyone.

All I said was what would you have done if you’d known it would happen.

*About two years ago our neighborhood became a redevelopment zone.*

*Empty houses with nothing inside them and the slowly destroyed road and*

*the fast appearing apartments*

*with these things*

*my childhood memories disappear.*

*Everything destroyed and apartments that all look identical to each other, uniform education, a society where even your parents don't like you if you go off the ordinary road...*

*I still don't know how I came to choose this road, in this society. The only thing is it seems like the small thought that I wanted to live differently from other people changed a lot of things for me.*

*-* Hong 10, *Feb. 2nd, 2011*

Note: the first-person monologue format used necessarily contains many grammatical errors. They were made on purpose; please ignore them.